

K Lover 301

Chapter 301: Make Her Way

After the conversation with the crown prince, Prince Rylen paid Rose a visit in her quarters. He asked her a few questions about her conversation with Caius. He also asked her when she would like to leave for Edenville. Rose replied that she would like to leave now, and Prince Rylen held back a chuckle at this. Then he told her the next morning would be better.

It was only after Prince Rylen came to see her that Rose started to believe Caius would let her go. Her excitement grew until she could barely contain it. She could barely sleep. The fact that she would be on her way to Edenville the next day was enough to keep her awake the whole night.

When the servants came to get her in the morning, Rose was already up and dressed to go. They helped her pack, which wasn't much of a help as she could only take a tiny bag. Prince Rylen had told her to pack lightly, as the journey would be done on horses so she could get to Edenville as soon as possible.

Rose was fine with this. After all, the clothes weren't actually hers. She was satisfied with leaving everything behind as long as she could go back home.

All she took was a change of clothes, her flute, and swallows. Perhaps her father would finish it this time. This was a thought she couldn't help but harbor. Rose didn't dwell on it too much, as it only brought memories about Ander. She didn't know what he currently thought about her, and it would be foolish of her to assume that things would remain the same way. But a small part of her hoped they would.

Since the crown prince had been willing to let her go home, there was a chance he might let her go forever. It was a dream, she knew, but right now she was hopeful enough to daydream.

"Ma'am," one of the servants called. It was clear they had been trying to get her attention for quite some time.

Rose snapped her head to look at her. "Yes," she answered.

"Someone is at the door," she said.

"Oh, right," Rose mumbled and glanced at the maid holding the bag.

She took a deep breath and walked to the door. Rose was not surprised when the open door revealed Sir Thomas. He was dressed in black apparel—a doublet embroidered in gold, a sword at his side, and boots almost reaching his knees.

"Lord Thomas," Rose said with a curtsy.

The latter simply grunted in response and started to walk away. Rose turned to the maid and stretched out her hand for the bag she held. The maid seemed a little hesitant to hand it to her; she would have been content taking it out for Rose.

She smiled softly as she accepted the bag, and Rose strapped it across her shoulder. It wasn't heavy; she could sprint while holding onto it.

She instinctively waved at the maid and rushed after Thomas, not caring if the maid waved back or not. Thomas was already some distance away, and it took her a moment to catch up.

She wasn't angry about this. It was just like Thomas. He didn't have to come get her himself, he could have sent a servant but he came all the way.

She got to his side and tried to keep the skip out of her step as Thomas led them to the main entrance. Rose gripped the strap of the bag tightly, more for something to do with her hand than from a need to hold it.

As soon as they came upon the entrance, just as the guards would open the doors, Rose heard a familiar voice call to her. She turned before she could think about it, and Lady Deana was rushing down the stairs with her dress in her hands and her maids with stricken expressions as they rushed after their lady.

Thankfully, she got to the bottom of the stairs without any incident and rushed toward Rose. Stopping about three feet away, she dropped her dress and grabbed Rose's hands.

Rose thought it was completely out of character for Lady Deana to do this. She was always prim and proper, polished and poised. The only time she had displayed this much urgency was when her husband arrived after searching for the bandits.

"Were you intending to leave without so much as a goodbye?" Lady Deana asked.

Rose wasn't trying to be rude, but she truly thought she had said enough goodbyes as it was. There was no need to bother the lady so early in the morning.

"I apologize, Lady Deana," Rose said sweetly. "I didn't want to pull you out of bed."

"I wouldn't have minded," she replied immediately. "But never mind. I hear you're going home to your mother. I am so happy for you. I'd like to give you some things to take home, but Thomas insists you're traveling light. However, it would be rude to return home empty-handed."

Rose noticed a maid step forward with a heavy sack—Rose hadn't even noticed the bag the maid was holding until she stepped forward.

"I am sure the horses will be able to take this. I made sure to pack things that aren't so heavy," Lady Deana said.

Rose froze for a little bit, but she knew instantly that there was no way she could refuse this. It was winter; she was worried that her father might not be able to save up enough food for the cold. This was more of a blessing than Lady Deana would ever realize.

"Thank you," she said, her eyes welling up as she looked at the lady. "I am very grateful."

Lady Deana looked at Rose with a proud expression, and it was clear this was the exact reaction she had been hoping to get.

"I wish you a safe trip," Lady Deana said and let go of Rose's hands.

Rose stretched out her hand to try to take the sack from the maid, but Thomas swatted her hand away. It didn't hurt, it was more shocking than painful.

"You!" He pointed to a random guard, and without saying a word, the guard rushed towards them and took the sack out of the open doors.

Rose curtsied to Lady Deana, and the lady smiled at her before Rose turned her back toward her and walked toward the door.

Rose felt her teeth chatter as the winter breeze hit her square in the face. It was harsh as it was cold. She adjusted the scarf around her neck, bringing it as high as she could. She knew the cold would only get worse from now on, but she knew even if she froze to death, she would still make her way to Edenville to see her dying mother.

There were about five horses. Two already had riders, and Rose recognized their faces as the crown prince's men. She figured two were for her and Thomas, but there was still an empty one.

She looked around, wondering if one of the men had not mounted his horse yet. In that moment, Thomas shot her a look as he got on his horse, and Rose rushed to the horse she assumed was hers. It was behind Thomas, a brown stallion with a black saddle.

"No," Thomas said without looking at her. "The other one. That one is for him. Took you long enough."

Rose turned her head as she immediately realized the glare Thomas sent her way wasn't directed at her. Rather, it was directed at the man behind her.

Chapter 302 302: Wishful Thoughts

"Him? Shouldn't you address me properly? That is no way to speak to your elder," a familiar voice replied.

Rose blinked as she stared at the figure approaching, and for a moment, she was too stunned to speak. The physician smiled at her as their eyes met, snapping her out of her speechlessness.

"L-Lord Paul," she stuttered, bowing her head and bending her knees.

"Good to see you are well enough to travel, Rose. I suppose we didn't have the chance for much of a conversation earl—"

"Enough chatter," Thomas interrupted. "We must leave now if we plan to make it to Stonegate before nightfall."

They were heading for Stonegate. Rose knew the journey from Stonegate to Edenville was about a day even with lots of breaks. As long as they got to Stonegate, she was certain she would get home tomorrow.

Tomorrow I will see my mother.

"So rude," Paul said with a scoff and walked towards the horse Rose had been told not to ride. "Do you need help getting on your horse?" he asked when he noticed Rose had not moved a step forward.

Rose blinked as Paul stood next to the brown horse. The older man was dressed in traveling clothes. His outfits weren't as ceremonial as the knight's. He wore simple pants, a thick woolen tunic, a coat, leather gloves, and a hat. He also had a bag similar to the one Rose wore across her shoulders.

"Are you coming with us?" Rose heard herself ask, though she didn't believe her mouth was working with how shocked she was.

"Yes," he said and squinted his eyes, then turned to look at Thomas. "Did she not know?"

Thomas didn't answer. Rather, he pulled on the reins, causing his horse to lift its front hooves. "Get on your horse, or get left behind," Thomas replied coldly.

Paul shook his head again, disappointed with Thomas. "Do you need help getting on your horse?" he asked again. "And to answer your question, yes. I will be embarking on the journey with you."

Embarking? Did that mean he wouldn't get to Edenville? He was just journeying with them.

Rose didn't want to have any wishful thoughts, so she simply nodded and rushed towards her horse. She had at least a hundred questions but there was no time to ask them, and she was truly worried that Thomas would leave her behind. Besides, if Lord Paul was coming with them, there would be plenty of opportunities to ask him.

Her stallion was a chestnut color, with a huge white patch where the saddle lay. It also had a small patch of white on its forehead. It seemed wary as she approached at first, but when Rose gripped the reins with clear experience, it relaxed.

She slipped one foot into the stirrup, lifted herself, and threw the other foot over the horse, straddling it. She steadied herself as she gripped the reins and almost immediately had to gesture for the horse to go, as Thomas was already setting off.

Paul gave her a sympathetic look as he rode beside her. She nodded at him and did her best to keep her lips sealed. Right now, focusing on the journey was more important.

The hooves of the horses echoed as they hit the hard ground, speeding towards the gates of the estate. Any moment now, the ground would be completely covered in snow, not at all conducive to traveling.

Rose realized as the gates shrank behind them that she was actually leaving the crown prince, even if it was just briefly, and this time around she didn't have to sneak out.

She took a deep breath as she urged on the horse, the cold air in her face, but Rose could barely feel it. She was so happy she could cry.

It didn't take long for them to get to the main gates of Furtherfield. Thomas didn't slow down as he led the way, only glancing back occasionally to look at her. He didn't say anything if he was satisfied with the distance between them; otherwise, he would yell out, "Faster!"

They rode all through the morning and it wasn't until noon that Thomas eventually let them get some rest. Rose was exhausted by the time they could stop, and the cold was catching up to her.

They had stopped in an open field covered in snow, not too far off the main path. There was a freezing lake on the other side, and Rose suddenly had a memory from childhood. They didn't have a lot of bodies of water in Edenville and had to rely on wells. However, there was a lake outside the town.

Rose had several memories of her, Ander, Emma, and a few other children making their way there to play on the frozen body of water, and more often than not accidents had happened. Thankfully, nothing detrimental. She chuckled at the memories. She hadn't seen the lake in a few years now, she wondered if it had dried up.

Rose recognized the road they were on as Stonefield Pass, which had gotten her excited, as she knew if they stayed on this path they would reach Stonegate. She rubbed her arms as she stood in the field away from the road. There was a mat to sit on, but Rose had spent the entire morning sitting on a horse—she wanted to give her rear a break.

"Here," Thomas said as he walked towards her, handing her bread.

Rose accepted it simply because his expression didn't give room for refusing. She smiled stiffly from the cold, and he handed her a waterskin.

Rose also accepted it, and he stared her up and down before he walked away. She shook her head as he left, trying not to laugh out loud. He was still as stubborn as ever, but she could tell he cared in his own awkward way.

"I am surprised he is nice to you," Lord Paul said.

Rose gasped a little, shocked at the intrusion—she had not heard him come closer.

"Lord Paul," she called, unable to hide the shock from her voice. "I wouldn't exactly call that nice."

"You are right," he said as he stood next to her.

Rose swallowed as she realized this was the opportunity she had to ask. "Lord Paul, would it be rude of me to ask why you're embarking on this journey with us?"

Chapter 303: Chivalrous

"Lord Paul, would it be rude of me to ask why you're embarking on this journey with us?"

Rose tried to phrase her words carefully. Regardless of how casually Lord Paul spoke to her, she had to remember he was still a noble and an important figure in Velmount. He was not to be spoken to lightly. It was also not a secret that he was close to the crown prince.

Lord Paul turned to look at Rose. His expression didn't change much as he stared at her, and Rose kept her gaze on the bread she held.

The horses were grazing not far off from them, and Rose couldn't help but wonder how they ate the frozen grass. The other men found a stump of a dead tree to sit on while Thomas roamed as though he were on duty.

"Well, it would be strange if I didn't tell you considering I am here because of you," Paul explained.

"Because of me?" Rose asked with wide eyes. She held the bread tighter. "I don't think I am so ill that your Lordship himself has to come with me."

Lord Paul laughed. "I can't tell if you really don't know or you're finding it hard to believe. His Highness wants me to take a look at your mother and do whatever I can for her. But..." Lord Paul immediately added, silencing the look of joy on Rose's face.

"I don't think I can do much for her. According to what I heard, she has been sick for a very long time," Paul said.

Rose tried not to squeeze the bread as she slowly nodded her head. "Yes, since she birthed me."

"I see, I am sorry," Lord Paul said.

Rose shrugged, trying her best to make it look easier than it really was. She didn't like to tie her birth to her mother's illness, as her mother would scold her about it, but Rose knew. Even if she wasn't the direct cause of her mother's illness, birthing her had worsened it.

"Thank you for coming with me," she replied in response.

"Don't thank me," Lord Paul said and grabbed onto the edge of his hat. "It wasn't my idea. If it were up to me, I wouldn't be here. His Highness's health is far more important to me than anything else. Unfortunately, I also cannot go against his orders. However, as soon as I confirm that there is truly nothing I can do for your mother, I will leave Edenville."

She was already cold, but she couldn't help but shiver even more at his words. She understood what he meant. The crown prince was currently poisoned; his best physician shouldn't be going on a journey with her to another part of the kingdom.

"I understand," Rose whispered.

It was not a thought she liked to think often, but her mother had been in so much pain for years. Acting tough even though she spent most of her later years bedridden. Maybe there would be less pain on the other side.

"Would His Majesty be well?" Rose heard herself ask. She didn't think she had any right to ask this, but Lord Paul wasn't looking at her as though this was her fault.

Lord Paul sighed. "I truly do not know, but all our heads would come flying off if he didn't, so I have no choice but to hope that he will. Which is why asking me to do this is beyond dangerous, as he is still very poisoned. But I can't go against His Highness's orders. You might want to eat your bread quickly. Thomas is walking this way."

Rose turned her head in the direction of the footsteps as she shoved the last of the bread into her mouth. She wasn't particularly hungry, but she didn't want to keep riding on an empty stomach. She opened the waterskin and was still drinking from it when Thomas appeared in front of them.

"Let's go," he said with a gruff voice.

Rose nodded and handed the waterskin back to him.

"Keep it," he said.

She didn't protest, just kept it in her bag so it was easier to carry around. If she were thirsty during the ride, she could just drink instead of calling his attention.

Rose lifted her hands and blew warm breath against her gloved fingers, not that it made much difference. But the cold was bearable, and she knew she would be able to manage until Stonegate. If it got colder, however, she might freeze to death.

Suddenly, Thomas shot Lord Paul a look, and the older man shrank, almost taking a step back. Thomas wasn't looking at his face; rather, he was looking at the coat the older man wore. Paul's expression immediately paled as he realized.

He looked torn, but at the same time, it would be embarrassing if he didn't offer Rose his coat after scolding Thomas about his rude behavior while he himself was being unchivalrous.

He sighed and slowly took his coat off. "Here," he said and handed it to Rose. "You need this more than I do."

Rose was shocked, and it was a little unexpected. She found it hard to believe that the man who had been annoyed that he wasn't by the crown prince's side was giving her his coat. However, she was too cold to decline.

"Thank you," she said as she graciously accepted.

Lord Paul didn't look too happy doing away with his coat, but he gave her a polite smile and said, "You're welcome."

"Move," Thomas yelled.

"Right away," Rose said as she rushed towards her horse. The other men were already seated and looked ready to leave.

She slipped into the coat, which was several sizes too big, but it was warm. After folding the sleeves, she got onto her horse while Thomas glared at her the whole time.

After he was certain she wouldn't fall off, he pulled on his horse's reins and led them back onto the path. Rose rode after Thomas, Paul rode next to her, and the men rode behind her. Together they headed for Stonegate.

Chapter 304: Welcome Home

Rose gripped the reins of her horse a little too tightly as the gates of Edenville appeared in view. Her throat closed, and she knew it wasn't because of the cold.

The night before, they had arrived at Stonegate pretty late and only pushed on through the cold because Thomas wouldn't even let them take a break. By the time they arrived at Stonegate, Rose was so exhausted she didn't eat dinner before falling asleep.

The next morning, she was woken up with a hot meal before sunrise, and not long after they had changed horses and set out from Stonegate.

Rose did notice she got a better reception this time and was even given a room, but she was too exhausted and cold to think too much about it. She would have been fine sleeping anywhere as long as it had warmth and a bed she could lie on.

The journey to Edenville had been quiet. Rose had been too tense to say anything. Her entire attention was on the journey. It didn't bother her that they didn't take a break until after noon. She felt like she could go on forever because any moment now she would be home.

Right now, she was looking at the wooden gates as her horse galloped forward. It hadn't changed, except for the snow that covered everything. Rose caught a glimpse of the well that started it all and she rushed for the gates, she didn't even have any thoughts about the well.

Rose's horse jumped over the wooden gates. It was never much of a gate in the first place and was more to show that this was the entrance to Edenville than anything else.

She heard a voice say slow down but Rose didn't understand the meaning. She urged the horse to ride even faster as she got into the town. Rose rode deeper into town, scaring the few folks on the roads as they rushed out of the way.

It didn't take long for the whispers to start passing through the town.

"Isn't tha Rose? Tha daugt'er of the wood maker?"

"Rose came wit strange men," another whispered.

The sun hadn't set just yet, and if it wasn't so cold, the streets would have been even more crowded with children playing and families sitting outside their houses. However, Rose's arrival was enough to drag them out into the cold.

Paul and the rest of the men could barely keep up with Rose, but Thomas never lost sight of her. He rushed after her as she sped through the streets, passing buildings and taking several turns as she made her way home, and even though he could easily overtake her, he never did.

Rose could make out her little cottage as soon as she came into her street. Sounds of windows and doors opening could be heard, and soon voices reached her ears as people pointed and called her name.

Her cottage was on the edge of the street just behind Emma's house. She could see the roof of Emma's house from the front of her own. Her house stood the same; the only difference was the snow.

Rose pulled on her reins with enough strength to bend the horse's neck backward. The horse didn't make a full stop before she jumped off it, nearly ripping her foot off as she removed it from the stirrup.

However, Rose didn't feel the pain because the front door was slowly opening and her father was stepping out, his shoulders slightly bent and a look of confusion clouding his face.

Rose felt her heart slam against her chest. It was beating so loudly it echoed in her ears. She was running before she even thought about it, screaming at the top of her lungs, "Fat'er."

Vallyn's expression quickly changed from confusion to shock and then to an expression that was filled with nothing but pure happiness. The corners of his eyes wrinkled, and he smiled brighter than snow reflected sunlight.

He opened his arms, and Rose slammed into him as though catapulted, but the older man didn't move an inch at the force she used to hug him. Rather, he closed his arms around her and hugged Rose really tight.

"Rose," he whispered, his voice heavy with emotion.

"Fat'er," Rose cried as she buried her face into his chest, her eyes filled with tears. "I am home, Fat'er."

"Welcome 'ome, Rose."

Thomas didn't get off his horse as he watched Rose hug her father in front of the small house. He could hear her sniffles as she clung tightly to him, not wanting to let go.

Suddenly, her father lifted his head and looked up at Thomas. The old man's expression darkened for a moment, but as though forcing himself, his expression slowly returned to normal. Still holding onto Rose, he attempted to bow.

This movement alerted Rose, and she slowly raised her head to see what the issue was. She turned to see Lord Thomas standing on a horse a few feet away. Her neighbors were loitering around, but because of Thomas they didn't dare approach.

She also noticed Lord Paul and the other men were missing. Did she ride too fast that they couldn't keep up? Rose's eyes widened in panic.

"Fat'er, this is Lord Thomas. He is a noble and a knight of the crown prince's personal army," Rose quickly explained to ease the awkward air and not anger Thomas any further.

"Lord T'omas, t'ank ye for bringin' my daug'ter 'ome safely," Vallyn said with a lower bow this time as Rose stood to the side.

Thomas squinted his eyes and turned his horse so it faced the direction they had just come. "I will get Paul," he said and rode off.

Rose nodded as she watched him ride off. Lord Paul would eventually find his way; the town wasn't big and anyone could point him in the direction of her house. Rose immediately assumed Thomas was giving her some privacy with her family, and she was grateful.

"Mot'er," she called as she looked up at her father.

He turned to look at her with a sad expression, and Rose felt her heart drop. Her father looked like he had aged at least five years, even though it had only been a few months since she last saw him.

"Inside. I am sure your mot'er would be so 'appy to see you."

Chapter 305: Mot'er

Rose dropped to the cold floor, doing her best not to cry as she held her mother's frail hand. Her hand was so thin that it made her fingers look longer.

The hand she held shivered, and Rose feared that with every movement, her mother's bones might break. It wasn't only her hand that looked frail, her entire body was frail.

There was barely any color in her face except for the strands in her hair. It was a bit ironic that she had such a full head of hair, yet her face lacked vibrancy.

Her lids fluttered as she tried to look at Rose, and it was pretty clear that it was quite straining for her to focus on her daughter.

"Mot'er," Rose cried. "I am here. I am back home."

"Rose," the voice that called her was winded, as though it took all her breath to call her name.

"Yes, Mot'er," Rose responded. She felt something fall onto her hands holding her mother's hand and that was when she realized she was crying.

Her mother was physically different from the woman she had left. This woman could barely sit on her own, she couldn't even keep her eyes open. She had also lost a lot of weight, and just one glance was enough to tell Rose she didn't have long left.

What happened while I was away? Rose screamed internally.

Her father squatted and gently patted her back with his arm. Rose lost it, and she leaned against her father as she wailed, still holding her mother's hand.

"Don't cry, Rose," a soft voice said, but the more her mother spoke, the more she broke.

"I am so sorry," Rose cried as she placed her mother's hand against her forehead while her father gently patted her back.

"Wha' are ye sorry for?" he said. "I am just glad yer 'ome in one piece, and I am sure yer mot'er is glad too."

Rose lifted her head and looked at her mother, who smiled. Rose tried her best to return it—she really did—but she didn't have it in her to smile when her mother was in such a state.

Her father had gravely understated the situation. If she had even an inkling that her mother was this much worse, she would have escaped the crown prince a long time ago.

"Fat'er," Rose called softly. "Why didn't you tell me? I-I..." Rose stopped speaking, as she knew there was truly nothing she could have done. She could not have gotten away from the crown prince—it would have been the same thing.

"Tis is not yer fault," he said. "Don't ye dare blame yerself."

"Welcome," her mother said before she could reply.

Rose nodded. She knew it took effort for her to speak, and with how breathless she sounded with every word, Rose didn't want her speaking much.

"Thank you," Rose replied.

Suddenly, a knock rang out, and Rose jerked her head towards the door.

"I will answer it," her father said and stood to his feet.

Rose nodded and watched her father go before turning to her mother. "I am fine, Mot'er. I promise," she said, gripping the older woman's hand. "The crown prince isn't evil, he is ni—not bad."

Rose couldn't bring herself to say Caius was nice, even while trying to assure her mother she was fine. "He even sent his best physician to come with—"

"Sorry," her mother started to say. Rose could see her face contort as she struggled to get out her words. "Ye would 'ave married Ander long ago. Mi fault."

Rose's eyes widened, and they swelled up with tears again. "No, Mot'er," Rose said, wiping at her tears with one hand. "Tha's not yer fault. I wanted to wait. Tha's not yer fault. Please don't blame yerself."

Rose sobbed as she spoke, slipping back into the dialect. She placed her mother's palm on her head once again. She didn't want the older woman to blame herself.

"Rose," her mother whispered. "Tis too isn't yer fault."

Rose was trying her best to hold back, but she couldn't anymore. Clutching her mother's hand, she wept, and the older woman used her other hand to lightly tap her on the back.

At that moment, her father returned and squatted next to her again. He didn't say anything, just stayed next to her while she cried and held her mother's hand. After some time, Rose eventually stopped crying loudly. Tears still flowed down her face, but at least she no longer screamed.

"Who was at the door?" she asked as she wiped at the ever-flowing tears with one hand.

"Neighbors. I told tha neighbors to come back later."

"Emma?" Rose asked, her face brightening a little.

Her father shook his head, and his face darkened a little, but it was too brief for Rose to notice again.

Rose nodded. She knew her father wouldn't chase Emma off—she was like family. She was sure Emma must have heard she was back. News around here traveled like wildfire. Any moment now, her friend would walk through the door and so would Ander. Rose couldn't think of him as her fiancé anymore—she didn't even have the heart to face him.

"Okay," Rose responded and turned away. She could have asked him about Ander too, but she couldn't open her mouth.

Rose couldn't help but notice that her mother was looking at her with a sad look in her eyes. She almost laughed; compared to her mother's situation, she was in a much better state.

Another knock rang out—this time it was slightly louder—and Rose got to her feet before her father could even react. "Let me," she said.

He nodded and held his wife's hand as Rose let go of her. Rose walked out of the room. She felt as though she needed a moment. She hoped it was Emma. She didn't want her parents to see how broken she was. She couldn't keep crying in front of her mother. The poor woman was sick, and now she had to worry about her.

Rose pulled open the door without even asking who was behind it, and she almost jumped out of her skin when she saw Thomas with the physician.

Chapter 306: Lord Paul And Lord Thomas

Thomas noticed her red eyes and the streaks of tears on her face that Rose had haphazardly tried to wipe away. She looked startled to see them, as though she had been expecting someone else.

"Lord T'omas, Lord Paul," Rose called, and Thomas' brows furrowed.

He didn't particularly hate it when she called him that, but he couldn't help but react. She curtsied, bowing her head to hide her face from them.

"Is it a bad time?" Paul was the one who broke the silence. His voice was heavy with concern as he asked.

"No, not at all," Rose said, but she kept her face down.

She knew just how bad she looked from all the crying. If she had known it was Lord Paul and Lord Thomas at the door, she would have at least tried to make herself a little presentable.

"Right this way, please." She turned her back to them and tried to wipe at her face as best as she could, cleaning most of the tears.

Rose walked ahead to the room where her mother was lying and met her father's eyes. He stared at her with confusion as he slowly approached.

Rose wiped her palms on her dress, suddenly feeling nervous. Perhaps, it was too soon—she hadn't even told her father about it.

"Fat'er," Rose said, phrasing her words carefully. "This is Lord Paul. His Majesty had asked that he accompany me so that he could check on Mot'er, and you have already met Lord Thomas."

"Yer Lords'ips," her father said with a very stiff bow.

Paul waved his hand and gave a polite smile. "No need to be so formal," he said and stepped closer.

Rose didn't miss that her father didn't step out of the way. Vallyn wasn't an average man by any means. Rose had only met a handful of people taller than her father, and not only was he tall, but he was also huge.

The man had muscles from cutting down trees and chopping up wood every day. Rose always thought it was a huge contrast with his delicate woodwork.

Her mother, on the other hand, was very petite compared to her father. Rose was somewhere in the middle, but even she looked tiny next to the huge man, and right now this huge man was towering over the two men, blocking the pathway, clearly having no intention of letting them inside to his wife.

"T'ere is no need for tha, mi lords. Mi wife 'as all tha treatment one can get," Vallyn said with his head bowed, but he didn't appear smaller in any way.

Rose felt her heart seize. She knew her father well enough to know what this was about. He didn't want the people who had taken his daughter to come anywhere close to his wife, and she knew the reason why her father was able to say this easily was because this was what her mother would want too.

Paul had a shocked look on his face and Thomas' face hardened. Rose knew she had to do something. Lord Paul might be nice, but Thomas was not one she could predict how he would react.

These men had enough power to punish her father, and not just that, but Paul was here on the orders of the crown prince—her father could not refuse.

"Fat'er," Rose said very softly and lightly touched her father on his arm. "Lord Paul is the crown prince's personal physician. I am sure he is better than all the physicians in Edenville. He is also here on His Majesty's orders. Please, let him check Mot'er."

Her father lifted his head to stare at her briefly, and his grey-hazel eyes rested on hers. Rose had taken his eyes; it was the one thing she shared with her father in appearance.

Rose squeezed her father's arm and she heard him take a deep breath before moving aside. She let out the breath she was holding and smiled shakily at the lords. Paul didn't seem bothered by the ordeal, while Thomas had a tight grip on his sword, but he didn't say a word, so Rose took that as a good sign.

Paul stepped forward and Thomas took a step back. "Paul, take your time. I will be back for you later."

Paul didn't even reply, his expression was serious as he walked to her mother's bed. Rose looked from her father to Thomas, then decided to see Thomas to the door.

He didn't say a word as she held the door open for him. Rather, he walked out without looking back and mounted the horse. Rose wondered where he was going, but she knew it was not her place to ask.

She unfortunately couldn't linger by the door, as her house had already drawn enough attention and people would be sure to approach her as soon as Thomas rode away.

She shut the door and walked back into the room, her heart in her throat. Her father was still where she left him, by the entrance with his arms folded. He looked as if Paul made a wrong move, he just might hit him with all his strength.

Rose couldn't quite see what the physician was doing, but he moved around very quickly—checking her mother's pulse, placing his head on her chest. He even used some tools Rose had never seen before.

He also checked the tips of her fingers and her toes. Her mother's eyes tried to follow his movements, but eventually she stopped out of exhaustion and fell asleep.

"Do ye trust him?" her father asked suspiciously.

Rose nodded. "Yes, Fat'er," she replied.

Her father looked like he was going to say something more, but he simply turned his gaze away. "I am 'appy yer back 'ome, Rosie," he said.

Rose nodded and leaned against her father. "Me too, Fat'er."

They both stood in silence as they watched Paul. After some time, Paul stepped away from her mother and turned to look at them with a dreary look on his face.

Chapter 307: Incredibly Weak

"Master Vallyn," Lord Paul addressed her father quite politely. Rose didn't even think he knew her father's name.

"Yes," her father replied, his hands falling to his sides as he unfolded his arms. He gave the physician a receptive look and with his arms unfolded he looked less threatening.

The seriousness of Paul's voice and expression was hard to ignore. Regardless of how her father felt about the situation, this was a physician that looked after the crown prince—he was without question better skilled than anyone around.

"I must speak plainly," Paul said, looking from father to daughter.

Rose shuffled on her feet and leaned her head forward. She felt very disturbed, and Paul's expression wasn't making her feel any better.

"As my lord pleases," Vallyn stiffly replied.

Paul nodded before he started to speak again. "Your wife is incredibly weak, and the illness of her heart worsens." Paul noticed the bigger man didn't say anything, just glanced at his wife who was peacefully sleeping.

"You can see how her lips turn bluish and how her skin has lost color. Her breath is short, and her limbs are swelling—a contrast to her shrinking body. These are not symptoms that can be restored. I will do what I can to alleviate the pain but..." Paul paused as he stared from father to daughter again.

"I cannot cure her and her..." he paused again, taking a deep breath. "Her time is drawing near."

Rose didn't even know when her father grabbed her palm, but he suddenly squeezed it at the physician's final words, and Rose's breath hitched. She used her free hand to cover her mouth to keep from crying out.

Her father, on the other hand, didn't even flinch. Paul immediately understood that it wasn't the first time Rose's father had heard this. He could see the pain in the older man's eyes, but other than that there was no other change as he listened to Paul.

Paul had suspected he would not be able to help much, but he didn't imagine the severity of it. She must have been gravely sick for a very long time. Perhaps he could have helped, but the chances of that were still slim. She would have succumbed to the effects of her illness eventually.

Paul allowed some time to pass before he continued speaking again. "I will prepare herbs that she will take tonight. It should help with the pain," he said. "I am sorry I cannot do more."

Rose watched the corner of Paul's eyes crinkle as he apologized. Rose thought he was too nice for someone who was attending to the next King. He didn't even have to help, but she was glad he did.

Rose slowly nodded and pulled her hand off her mouth. She had to pull herself together even though all she wanted to do was sit in a corner and weep for her dying mother. She couldn't do that, she had to be strong for the woman who birthed her.

"Thank you, Lord Paul," Rose whispered.

He turned to her and gave her a sad look. "I cannot stay too long, especially since I know the state of your mother. There is nothing I can do that will change her situation. I have to return to Furtherfield. I worry about His Highness. I hope you understand."

Rose nodded. "I understand."

"I shall seek out the herbs I need to make the brew for her," Paul said and started towards the door.

"Let me come with you, Lord Paul," Rose softly offered.

"No," he said, shaking his head without turning back. "You have only just returned. Spend as much time with your family. I shall bring you the herbs before nightfall," Paul replied.

He paused as he got to the front door, knowing that Rose had followed after him. She opened the door to the small cottage and curtsied.

Paul smiled tightly at her and walked out the door. His horse was tied to the side of the house. Rose stepped out of the door with him and helped undo the horse.

She led the horse to him, and Paul didn't immediately climb onto the horse. He looked at her as though he might say something. However, he simply accepted the reins and climbed onto the horse.

Rose wanted to ask if he knew his way around here. She wasn't worried about Thomas—he had been here before. Paul, on the other hand, didn't seem like he had lived anywhere else except the capital.

"Where will you go?" Rose asked softly.

"The marketplace," he said softly. "I should find what I need there."

Rose wasn't sure about that. Depending on the kind of herbs he needed, it might be a little hard to find them in the market, and some might need to be fresh. The only person who had those was the healer at the outskirts of town. That was where Rose had gotten the herbs her mother had been taking.

She wasn't a physician, but most of the villagers went to her if they fell ill or hurt themselves, and she always had the right herbs for them. Rose was certain she would have the herbs Paul needed.

"You could ask for Madam Carol, the healer," Rose mumbled. She didn't want him to waste his time looking around. "Better yet, let me come with you." She glanced towards her horse.

"No," Paul said sternly. "I will be fine. If I need anything, I will ask around. Stay with your family. You haven't seen them in a long time..."

Rose nodded, feeling her eyes swell. She could almost hear the rest of his words. Her mother didn't have long—she should spend as much time as she could now.

"I will get the herbs. If I can't bring them, I'll send someone."

Rose nodded and stepped away from the horse. She knew Paul and Thomas would stay in the baron's house. She didn't know how long they intended to stay in Edenville, but with the snow and Paul's urge to return to the crown prince, she knew it wouldn't be long.

When Paul rode off into the distance, she was still standing in the empty yard with snow falling onto her skin. She didn't feel it. After some time, she turned around and walked into the house.

Chapter 308: Ander And Emma Are...

When Rose returned to the house, her father had pulled the bench next to his wife. He didn't hold her hand; he just sat down, staring at her as she lay on the wooden bed.

Rose walked to him, and he glanced backwards, then gestured for her to come closer. Rose dragged her feet as she walked to her father. She dropped to the bench, dejection clearly written on her face.

Her mother was still sleeping and the older woman looked so peaceful as she slept, her face devoid of worries. Even her wrinkles didn't hide how peacefully she was sleeping.

"Tired," her father explained. "Yer mot'er is very 'appy to see ye."

Rose nodded and rested her head on her father's shoulder. "What happened?"

"Ye speak like tha Lords now," her father smiled. "Good."

Rose suddenly felt embarrassed and turned away. "I 'ad to learn," she explained.

"I know, I am glad," he said and shuffled her hair. "Yer mot'er was really sad when ye left. Wouldn't stop cryin' and almost stopped eatin'."

Rose felt her heart squeeze. Her mother wouldn't have gotten this drastically sick if she hadn't left home. She felt something twist inside her.

"Nay," her father said, shaking his head. "Not yer fault. Ye should 'ave let tis old man die. I 'ave lived long enough. Not become a slave to..." her father's voice broke.

Rose shook her head and held onto her father's arm. "No Fat'er. I will never let anything happen to you. I am sorry I left without a word."

Vallyn laughed. "Ye say it like ye 'ad a choice. Wen we got yer letter, I and yer Mot'er was so 'appy. We didn't know if ye were still alive, no one 'ad 'eard from ye and I couldn't leave yer mot'er. It sounds like an excuse, don't it? I oug't to 'ave gotten on a 'orse and gone after ye."

Rose shook her head. "You did the right thing father. I knew you could take care of Mot'er."

Vallyn shook his head. "I didn't do a good job. Look at the state yer mot'er's in." He dug into his eyes with his thumb and index finger.

Her father was huge but right now he was hunched over with a sad tone in his voice. It broke Rose's heart. Her father didn't do a bad job. Someone had torn her family apart.

"Mot'er has been sick for a long time. I know you did your best Fat'er. Thank you," Rose whispered and lightly tapped her father's back.

He pulled his hand from his face and placed it over her shoulder instantly showing the difference in size between them.

Rose settled in the cradle of her father's arm and once again the thought of Emma and Ander echoed in her head. She lifted her head and looked towards the door.

"I was sure Emma would be here by now." Rose purposely didn't mention Ander. She didn't have the heart to do it. She was certain she had nothing to worry about with Emma.

"Do you think she doesn't know I am here?" Rose asked when her father didn't say anything.

"Emma knows," he said with a sigh. "I don't think Emma is coming."

It wasn't his words that bothered Rose, it was the finality in his tone that did. If he didn't sound like he did, Rose could have found numerous excuses for why Emma wouldn't come, and there were a plethora of them with the major one being Emma's mother.

The older woman was nice but could be a bit standoffish and stern. In the social ladder, Rose's family was pretty low but Emma's parents were in a decent position and so was Ander.

If it wasn't that Rose was stubborn and hard to get rid of, Emma's mother would have found a way to end the relationship between the two girls but eventually she warmed up a little.

She was still hard on their friendship and Emma wasn't allowed outside after dark even if she was just hanging out with Rose who lived behind their own house.

So Rose could have found an excuse for her childhood friend but something told her this wasn't something an excuse could cover.

Rose took a deep breath as the uneasy feeling she had been ignoring enveloped her. "Why?" Rose asked, trying to laugh it off. "Her mother again? I just came back, she wouldn't keep Emma away."

Vallyn's hand fell off her shoulder. "Ye just got back 'ome. I didn't want to give ye a reason to worry but ye are going to 'ear it from someone else if I don't tell ye."

"Tell me what?" Rose asked, trying to act as normal as possible but the gnawing feeling in her stomach worsened. Even though the fireplace was burning Rose suddenly felt an intense amount of cold.

"Ander—"

"Ander?" Rose asked with a frown. "I asked about Emma."

"Tha is wha I want to tell ye, Rose..."

"What has Ander to do with this?" Rose didn't like how shaky her voice was but she couldn't stop it, just as she couldn't stop her mind from conjuring different thoughts.

"Ander and Emma are married. They married just at the start of winter."

Rose widened her eyes and erupted into laughter. "You're joking father," she said and grabbed her stomach. "I was so worried they had gotten into some kind of accident trying to get me back from the crown prince." Rose laughed some more. "Married," she laughed again.

"Rosie," Vallyn called as he watched his daughter laugh hysterically. "I would never joke about that."

Rose stopped laughing and looked at her father's face, realizing he had not said he was pulling her leg. His face was serious and there was a hint of pity in his eyes.

She also remembered how her mother blamed herself for not marrying Ander and she had thought it was because if she had been married, the crown prince wouldn't have been able to take her away. But now that she thought about that, it wouldn't have mattered to Caius if she was married or not. From the moment she ran into him, she was doomed.

"Ander and Emma are married?" she asked.

"Yes, Emma is pregnant with a child."

Chapter 309: Cold Tears

"Pregnant with a child." The words echoed in Rose's head as she fled out of the house.

Her father had tried to stop her, but Rose didn't even give him a chance. He couldn't chase after her because he couldn't leave her mother all by herself.

There was no reason her father would lie but Rose had to see for herself before she believed what she had heard. There was some mix-up or misunderstanding, she was sure of it. There was no way the two most important people to her after her parents would do something like that together.

She could understand Ander getting married, after all they should have married a long time ago, and who knew when the crown prince was going to let her go. Her excuse didn't make much sense, she knew, but she could still understand.

However, for both of them to equally betray her, Rose couldn't believe it. She had to see it for herself before she could believe something like that. It was just impossible for her to believe without proof; she was certain there would be a reasonable explanation. Something that would make sense of this situation.

Rose didn't head for Emma's family house, which was right behind hers, rather she headed for Ander's, which was two streets away. If they were truly married that's where they would both be.

Rose untied her horse and mounted it quickly. The horse had been left out in the cold, eating the frozen grass but it didn't seem to be bothered by that. She didn't have a stable and would eventually have to take the horse somewhere safe and warm.

It was easier to get to Ander using the horse and she needed to get there as fast as she could.

Rose was riding faster than she needed to but she couldn't stop herself. She concentrated all her thoughts on riding as anything else was too painful.

The horse took the last bend and soon enough Rose approached Ander's house. She caught sight of the fence she had gone over to see him that night. Rose felt her head ring, it hurt too much. She could feel it all over her chest to her head.

She led the horse to the front of the gates. It was big enough to let a small carriage through, though Ander's family didn't own one. They had a horse which belonged to his father, and they had several farm animals but no carriage.

Rose got off the horse in one stealthy movement. She was pretty used to getting on and off horses now. She rushed forward banging on the wooden gates, not caring that the horse might wander away if she left it untied.

The horse was still for a moment then it moved about as neighbors started to notice the commotion and drew closer but none tried to speak to her directly.

"Is tha Rose, tha one wit a sick mot'er?"

"I told ye Rose 'as returned. Did 'er really think 'er would return like nothin' 'appened?"

Rose banged the gates again but she still didn't get any response. Her heart sank deeper. She banged the gates until her palms turned red and they started to sting.

"Have some guts to face me!" Rose yelled as her legs gave out from underneath her. She fell to the cold floor, her forehead resting on the cold wooden gates and her legs on the snow.

Her face felt wet, she was crying. She could hear voices behind her and she knew she was making a spectacle of herself but right now, her pride was the last thing that mattered.

None of the villagers approached, they just stayed at a distance staring and gossiping in the cold. The villagers weren't all nice to her. Her mother was sick with an illness that wouldn't heal. In a village like hers that was enough for ridicule.

It also didn't help that her mother was an orphan raised by her grandmother, who died just before Rose was born, and to top it all up, her father was an outsider.

These were more than enough reasons for the villagers to stay clear of her and for little kids to bully her, but Rose was resilient and didn't let any of these things bother her.

She was about to start pleading, saying something along the lines that she understood, when she heard the sounds of the wooden gates opening. She got to her feet immediately and wiped her cold tears.

The doors opened revealing Ander's mother. Ander didn't bear much resemblance to his mother. His mother was mostly soft-spoken unless someone stepped on her garden. She was hardly recognizable when this happened.

"Madame Oliver," Rose whispered with water in her eyes.

"Oh, ye poor lass," the woman said with sympathy. "I 'eard ye returned. I could scarcely believe mi ears."

Rose nodded but she wasn't the least interested in pleasantries. She was certain the woman knew why she was here, and it had taken longer than necessary for someone to come to the gates.

"Yes," she tried to reply as politely as possible. "Is Ander home?"

"Ye don't look as bad as I imagined. I am glad," she said instead of answering her question.

Rose nodded and tried to look past his mother, but she didn't move from the entrance, and by the looks of things she had no intention of inviting Rose in.

"Thank you. I'd like to see Ander, please?" Rose knew her eyes still looked red and she was once again on the verge of crying.

"Ander isn't 'ere," she replied.

Rose's face fell. Without a single doubt, she knew the woman was lying. "Is that so? Then what about Emma?" Rose felt like throwing up as she asked the question.

"Ye 'ave 'eard. Tis unfortunate but I am afraid tha is tha situation now. Ander is married and ye 'ave to let it go."

Rose closed her eyes briefly. "I just want to hear it from them. I am not asking for too much, am I?"

"'Ear it from..." Madame Oliver paused, looking very irritated. "Do ye tink I am lyin' to ye?"

"No, no. He is my fiancé, I just want to—"

"Was!" Madame Oliver corrected. "Was! No son of mine will marry a 'arlot."

Rose staggered. It felt as though she had been slapped. In their eyes, she was nothing more than a whore. It felt like someone had stabbed a thousand needles into her heart.

Rose leaned forward as it suddenly felt hard to breathe. The stares behind her felt like they might pierce through her back. She struggled to get her breathing under control and slowly lifted her head.

"Thank you," she said, feeling the tears dry in her eyes.

There was no point crying over spilt milk nor was there a reason to prove herself to such people. The betrayal was hard to take but it wasn't like she could have come back and married Ander, perhaps this was good.

Madame Oliver looked shocked at her response but Rose had already turned away with a dazed look in her eyes. She didn't even bother looking for the horse. She just started walking in the direction of her house.

"Rosie," Emma called.

Chapter 310: Not Pretending

"Rosie," Emma called.

Rose froze at the voice and it took everything for her not to jerk her head backwards. She could recognize that voice anywhere. She was certain Emma was behind her, but Rose wasn't sure if she wanted to see.

She had come all this way and now she didn't know. Nevertheless, Emma stepping out of Ander's family home was all the confirmation she needed.

Her best friend wouldn't be there if they weren't married, and perhaps it was also true she was pregnant with his child too. Rose winced as she realized she would have to deal with not having a best friend anymore.

"Emma," Madame Oliver called, her voice a little too soft. "Wha are ye doin' out 'ere in the cold? Ye must rest for tha baby. It is warmer inside. Ye must not upset tha baby."

Rose closed her eyes as she heard the confirmation about the pregnancy and when she opened them again, they were blank. She rubbed her arms; she was starting to feel the cold, which was good. The cold made her thoughts unclear.

She took a step forward. It was hard, and more than once the thought of turning around crossed her mind, but there was no point. She didn't think any excuse could justify this, and now that she had her confirmation, she was done here.

"I wish you a happy marriage, Emma," she said and carried on walking.

"Rosie!" Emma screamed and tried to go out the gate, but Madame Oliver stopped her.

"Ye can't go out in tha cold. Tha baby."

"Rosie, please just turn around," Emma cried while Madame Oliver held onto her.

Rose didn't, and neither did her footsteps falter. She just walked the way back home in the cold, kicking off the piles of snow on the ground. The setting sun made the weather even colder.

Her teeth chattered as she walked home, but Rose didn't fight the cold—she welcomed it. It was certainly better than the thoughts that wanted to rip her apart.

"Rosie," her father called as she opened the door. He looked very concerned. "Ye just ran out. I was worried. Did ye go to see..."

Rose nodded, dusting off the snow on her body, and walked through the door before shutting it. The house was warm. It was nice to be in the warmth, but she missed the cold. The thoughts that the cold had abated were spinning around her head.

Rose nodded and gave her father a sad smile. Perhaps because she had been crying all day, not a single tear fell from her eyes. "Yes."

"Did ye see Ander?! Tha bastard. 'Ow could..."

"It's fine, Fat'er. Thank you for telling me. It would have been worse if I had heard it from someone else first. Sorry for running out without any explanation."

"It's okay," her father said.

His tone was soft as he spoke, and his eyes didn't leave Rose. He was studying her, looking for anything amiss, but Rose's expression wasn't giving anything away.

"How's Mot'er?" she asked, changing the subject.

"Yer mot'er is still asleep. Someone came by. 'E brought tha 'erbs tha Lord was talkin' about and a balm to 'elp wit tha swellin'. We are to boil tha 'erbs first before yer mot'er will drink it."

Rose nodded as she listened. "Where are tha herbs?" she asked.

"Inside," he replied.

Rose nodded. She would boil it over the fireplace after she had cooked dinner so that her mother could drink it as soon as she ate. Rose wasn't sure if they had anything, but Lady Deana had given her enough food for some time.

"Are ye really okay, Rosie?" Vallyn asked. He approached his daughter and placed a heavy hand on her shoulder.

Rose sighed and closed her eyes, but she didn't force herself to smile. "Yes, Fat'er. I promise I am fine."

"Ye don't 'ave to push yerself. It 'as been 'ard, and now this. Ye don't 'ave to pretend to be strong."

Rose didn't think she was pretending in the slightest. It hurt, there was no mistaking that. However, it wasn't as crushing as when she first heard.

Besides, even if Ander wasn't married to Emma, she doubted things could go back to the way they used to be. His mother had said it herself: she wouldn't let her son marry a harlot.

"I am not pretending, Fat'er, I promise. I am okay. Now, sit back so I can prepare some dinner and Mot'er's herbs."

"Rosie," Vallyn called, his voice still held worry.

"Fat'er," she called back.

Vallyn sighed and took his hand off her shoulders. "I will stay wit yer mot'er," he reluctantly said.

Rose nodded and stepped away, going towards her old bedroom which also partially served as a store and where cooking equipment was kept. She would need pots and hopefully, there was water. With the snow, it would be hard to get water, and she didn't want to have to rely on melted snow. There wasn't much time now to melt it and there wasn't enough snow yet, sand could get mixed up in it.

Thankfully, there was more than enough water and Rose got to work. She wanted to make something easy and simple. She had been ignoring her fatigue, but she knew she couldn't remain on her feet for too long.

Rose opted for soup, using some of the ingredients Lady Deana had given her. She was grateful for them, she hadn't seen anything worthwhile in the store, and her mother was sick. She needed to eat as healthily as possible.

The pot hung low and Rose stirred the soup. The aroma filtered through the air, adding to the warmth in the room. Rose couldn't help the smile on her face—when was the last time she cooked for her parents?

"It smells delicious," her father commented.

"Thank you," Rose said with a smile, without looking back.

"I tink so too," a softer voice said.

"Mot'er," Rose cried, realizing that her mother had woken up. However, she couldn't leave the pot just yet.

"Carry on," her father said. "I can't wait to eat."

Rose laughed and kept stirring. "It will be ready soon."